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## **(Im)politeness and regional variation**

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### **1. Introduction**

(Im)politeness varies across regions. It has been found that notions of what is considered polite or impolite differ between communities distributed in space in which the same language is spoken. This type of variation is illustrated in the following post: “I phoned Netflix customer support which is US based, they were so overly polite I thought they were being sarcastic and hung up.” This post was submitted to the website “British Problems” (<http://www.reddit.com/r/britishproblems>) in 2014 by a speaker of English in the United Kingdom. It shows that ideas about appropriate verbal behaviour in a given social situation diverge across different parts of the natively English-speaking world. The caller had obviously expected to be dealt with in a different manner. In the situation, the caller was taken by surprise by the interlocutor’s behaviour, which was perceived as inappropriate, and terminated the phone call without accomplishing his or her original goal. In retrospect, however, the caller acknowledges the existence of diverging norms and expectations in explicitly mentioning that the customer support is based in the United States and that the caller only *thought* they were being sarcastic, which, in fact, they were not, it is implied, by their own standards, thus, assuming that in the US a higher investment of politeness is required, which is considered excessive by British standards

The present chapter examines how notions of (im)politeness and appropriate behaviour may vary across countries sharing the same language, but may also differ within a country. Conceptualisations of region and regional variation in general are discussed in section 2, while section 3 provides an overview of research on (im)politeness and regional variation in a range of languages. In section 4, two case studies of regional pragmatic variation are presented, one on English and one on Spanish as the two most frequently investigated languages in this context. Finally, section 5 includes a summary and outlines future research.

### **2. Key concepts and theories: Region and regional variation**

The study of regional variation in language has a long history. Observations of geographical diversity and dialect differences date back to the thirteenth century; even earlier comments were made by the Greeks. In the Romantic period, rural dialects were believed to preserve a language in its purest form. Dialectology as a linguistic discipline, as it emerged in the course of the nineteenth century, has been focused on describing how dialects differ from each other by identifying distinctive features. Dialect geography in particular has been aimed at determining dialect areas and the boundaries between them. The distribution of variants in geographical space and dialect areas with their boundaries have been plotted on maps and presented in linguistic atlases (cf. Schneider, 2005a).

Traditional dialectology has predominantly concentrated on regional variation within one country. Yet, since dialect areas do not necessarily coincide with political units and since dialects are not discrete subdivisions but, as a rule, form continua of mutually comprehensible varieties which may transgress nation-state boundaries, regions in neighbouring countries are occasionally also considered (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998: 3-12).

For some pluricentric languages, there is an additional, but more recent tradition of investigating regional variation on a national level. Pluricentric languages are languages spoken natively in more than one nation-state (cf. Clyne, 1992). Examples include French (spoken in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada), German (spoken in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and also Belgium), and especially Spanish, with more than twenty national varieties in Latin America alone, and English with national varieties on all continents.

Sociolinguists have furthermore examined regional variation on the local level, analysing the variety of a given language spoken in a particular city or town. Examples include Trudgill's famous study of Norwich in England (Trudgill, 1974) and more recent studies of Pittsburghese, i.e. the variety of American English spoken in Pittsburgh (Johnstone, 2013). Work in sociolinguistics has also been carried out on sublocal variation, as for instance in the classical study by Milroy and Milroy of Belfast, contrasting the varieties spoken in three inner-city working class districts (L. Milroy, 1980; J. Milroy, 1981). Moreover, it has been suggested that supranational regions exist, differing in their cultural values and their pragmatic norms. In her review of empirical work on compliments, Kasper (1990) notes that British English compliments differ from compliments paid in American English and other national overseas varieties of the English language, where the force of compliments is maximized, while British English compliments are more similar to compliments paid in Germany or Scandinavia where the force of compliments is minimized. Kasper (1990: 199) therefore postulates a supranational area of shared cultural values in North-Western Europe. This claim, which has yet to be substantiated in systematic empirical study, is reminiscent of Galtung's (1981) concept of macro-cultures and sub-civilizations. Both approaches, Kasper's and Galtung's, remind us that sharing a culture does not necessarily mean sharing a language, and, vice versa, that sharing a language does not automatically mean sharing a culture (cf. also Culpeper, 2012: 1128), including sharing perceptions of (im)politeness and appropriate behaviour.

Against this background, five types of regional variation can be distinguished, namely supranational, national, subnational, local and sublocal. So far, the focus of relevant research has been on national variation (but cf. section 3 below for further detail).

Studies on all levels of regional variation have predominantly dealt with differences in pronunciation, lexis and grammar. Pragmatic differences, on the other hand, have largely been neglected, and this applies in particular to differences concerning (im)politeness. Differences of this kind are in the focus of variational pragmatics (Schneider & Barron, 2008; Barron & Schneider, 2009; Schneider, 2010; Barron, 2014). This discipline is conceptualized as the interface of pragmatics with dialectology. In this context, dialectology is not limited to the study of regional variation as in traditional dialect geography, but defined in broader terms as it is understood e.g. in the United States today (Wolfram & Schilling, 2016). In this view, modern dialectology corresponds to that branch of sociolinguistics dealing with linguistic variation in

general and, thus, including the study not only of regional variation, but also the study of social variation.

In the framework of variational pragmatics, region is one of currently five so-called macro-social factors whose impact on language use in interaction is investigated (cf. Schneider & Barron 2008: 16-19). The other four factors are gender, age, ethnicity and social class, but no claim is made that this list is exhaustive. Macro-social factors effect variation in language use, specifically regional, gender, age, ethnic and socioeconomic variation, resulting in the respective dialects or, more neutrally, varieties (on gender variation and (im)politeness, cf. Christie and Mullany, this volume).

While it is perfectly legitimate, if not necessary, to analytically distinguish the macro-social factors in empirical work and study each of them individually and separately in order to determine their respective impact on language use in interaction, it is, of course, clear that in real life there is an interplay among these different factors. Conceivably, each possible configuration is characterized by specific ways of using language. Needless to say, apart from variety-specific ways of speaking there are language-specific conventions, i.e. preferred ways of speaking generally considered as a norm, and also a common core of communicative behaviours, of which some may be universal.<sup>1</sup>

Variational pragmatics has been accused of variationist essentialism of the Labovian type. It is, however, no coincidence that the name chosen is ‘variational pragmatics’ and not ‘variationist pragmatics’ (Schneider, 2010: 251). Ultimately variational pragmatics is not interested in crude facts, but in identities. In more concrete terms, variational pragmatics is not interested in sex, but in gender, and not in race, but in ethnicity, and so on. In this context, researchers often speak of “regional and social variation” as if gender, age, ethnicity and social class were all social factors, whereas region would be something different. In variational pragmatics, however, a distinction is made between geographical space on the one hand and regional affiliation and identity on the other hand. The relationship between the two is the same as that between biological sex and socially constructed gender, or between chronological age and psychological age. This means that speakers in their language use do not necessarily identify with the region they live in, nor necessarily with the region, if different, they were born in or grew up in. It is assumed that regional identity can also be chosen, constructed and displayed at will.

Rejecting variationist essentialism does not automatically mean subscribing to a constructionist position. An alternative is the “emic first-order approach to macro-social factors” advocated by Haugh and Schneider (2012), who write: “we would like to treat all macro-social factors as identities as they are displayed and perceived by participants (in the emic sense) in an interaction” (Haugh & Schneider 2012: 1017). This approach is based, among other evidence, on the observation that in everyday contexts ordinary language users as lay persons categorize individuals they encounter in terms of looks (e.g. dress, hairdo) and behaviours (both verbal and non-verbal) as members of a particular social group or community, as also demonstrated in communication accommodation theory (cf. Gallois & Giles, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. House (2005: 17-18), who, in her multi-layered model of politeness, distinguishes between universal, cultural-specific and language-specific aspects.

Macro-social factors not only interact with each other in any one person, they also interact with micro-social factors in each interaction. Unlike macro-social factors, micro-social factors are relational, pertaining to the constellation and the relationship between the interlocutors. The most frequently discussed micro-social factors are social distance/familiarity, i.e. how well the interlocutors know each other, and power/relative social status, i.e. whether the relationship is symmetrical or asymmetrical. These two factors play a crucial role in Brown and Levinson's (1987[1978]) politeness theory, but also in empirical speech act analysis (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1995). According to the Bulge theory (Wolfson, 1988), social distance is not a dichotomous category but forms a continuum, with a maximum investment of politeness in the middle (which can be visualized as a bulge in a graph), representing relationships between acquaintances, e.g. workmates or neighbours who are not friends, and a minimum investment of politeness at the end points, i.e. between strangers (with no social consequences after one-shot encounters) or, on the other hand, in close or intimate relationships (where redressive action is considered unnecessary). These and similar findings point to the fact that verbal behaviour and its appropriateness varies not only across varieties, but also across situations. Moreover, recent research has found that in the same situation speakers of the same regional variety differ in their (perception of the) use of language and interactional practices (see, for example, Clyne, Kretzenbacher, Norrby, & Schupbach, 2006, in the next section). In the same type of context, Haugh and Carbaugh (2015) observe regional variation on a national level as well as both intra-varietal and intra-individual variation.

This section has dealt with general notions of region and regional variation in dialectology, sociolinguistics and pragmatics to provide the conceptual background for the following section, which includes a review of the research literature specifically focused on regional variability in (im)politeness in a range of languages.

### **3. Critical overview of research on (im)politeness and regional variation**

In this section we provide an illustrative overview of studies on (im)politeness and regional pragmatic variation.<sup>2</sup> We adopt a broad view of (im)politeness as (in)appropriate behaviour (Meier, 1995; Schneider, 2012a) (see Introduction). Therefore, we include studies that explicitly or implicitly aim to identify similarities and differences regarding what participants in an interaction or informants responding to a questionnaire, for example, consider (in)appropriate behaviour in a given context. This also covers the study of what some authors refer to as communicative styles, associated with a cultural group's notions about "the appropriate ... ways of jointly accomplishing social interaction" (Blum-Kulka, 1997: 14).

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<sup>2</sup> For overviews on regional pragmatic variation in general, see Schneider and Barron (2008) and Placencia (2011). Language-specific overviews can be found, for example, in García and Placencia (2011) for Spanish, and Schneider (2012b) for English.

Among those studies with an explicit (im)politeness focus, some draw on Brown and Levinson's face theory (1987[1978]) (Hardin, 2001),<sup>3</sup> and variations of this theory such as Scollon and Scollon's (2001[1995]) deference, solidarity and hierarchy face systems (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008), while others choose to employ the basic notions of autonomy and affiliation behind Brown and Levinson's framework to discuss affiliation and distance creating/maintaining strategies, for example, without necessarily adopting the full framework (Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2004). Others draw on Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle and maxims (Schneider, 1999) or Spencer-Oatey's (2000, 2008) rapport management framework (García, 2009). Many studies involve discussions of variation in cultural preferences or values with reference to a number of dimensions that have been proposed in cross-cultural pragmatics research (cf. House, 2000) such as directness-indirectness, verbosity-restraint, formality-informality and person vs. task orientation (Placencia, 2005) as well as frameworks from other fields such as Hofstede's (1991) with his notions of individualism and collectivism, for example (Muhr, 2008).

Contrastivity and comparability are two essential principles in the study of regional pragmatic variation and variational pragmatics more widely (cf. Schneider, 2010). However, no particular theoretical approach is advocated. Indeed, different theoretical perspectives have been employed including, among others: ethnography of speaking (Herbert, 1989), sociopragmatics (Breuer & Geluykens, 2007), ethnopragmatics (Goddard, 2012), interactional pragmatics (Merrison, Wilson, Davies, & Haugh, 2012), and corpus linguistics (McCarthy, 2002). Reflecting different theoretical perspectives, different data sources and data collection methods are used including field notes from (non)participant observation (Herbert, 1989), transcriptions of recordings of naturally occurring spoken interaction be it institutional or non-institutional (Jautz, 2008), existing corpora such as the International Corpus of English (ICE) (Kallen, 2005), production questionnaires, including the more recent *free* DCTs (cf. Barron, 2005) or dialogue production tasks (Schneider, 2008) as well as e-DCTs (Mack & Sykes, 2009), role plays (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010), film scripts (Formentelli, 2014), magazine ads (Hernández Toribio, 2011), etc. The focus of a given study may thus be on perceptions of (in)appropriate behaviour (Schneider, 2012a, 2012c)<sup>4</sup> when production questionnaires and other data elicitation methods are employed, or actual language usage when naturally occurring data are utilized. A combination of methods and data sources can be found in some studies such as Norrby and Kretzenbacher's (2014) that focusses on address practices in varieties of Swedish and German. In addition to data obtained through participant observation, these authors use data from focus group discussions, social network interviews, questionnaires, and online forums. Needless to say, different methods have their own limitations. Production questionnaires, for example, have been extensively criticized in that they do not give access to actual language use; however, they can be a valuable tool for the study of perceptions of language use and permit systematic control of relevant social variables, thus warranting comparability which is crucial for any type of contrastive or variational study. Ultimately, the choice of methodology for any study needs to be guided by clearly defined

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<sup>3</sup> The examples of empirical works provided throughout Section 3, like Hardin (2001), are illustrative of studies available.

<sup>4</sup> Perceptual studies in the narrow sense of the term are rare, but cf. e.g. Curcó and De Fina (2002) and Schneider (2013).

research questions as well as practical considerations. Triangulation, as in Norrby and Kretzenbacher's (2014) work, is useful as it sheds light on different aspects of the same phenomenon, therefore adding robustness to a study and facilitating a deeper understanding of what is (in)appropriate behaviour in a given context.

(Im)politeness can be studied at different discourse levels. Schneider and Barron (2008) propose the following: the 'actional' or speech act level that involves function-to-form mapping (Warga, 2008); the 'formal' domain that focuses on the communicative functions of linguistic forms and, therefore, deals with form-to-function mapping (Barron, 2011); the 'interactional' that involves the analysis of sequential patterns to realize specific speech acts or phases of an interaction such as openings and closings (Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2004); the discourse 'topic' level which includes, for example, topic selection and topic development (Wolfram & Schilling 2016: 155-165), and the 'organizational' level which covers the analysis of aspects of turn-taking such as simultaneous talk and interruptions (Fant, 1996). The nonverbal level that deals with phenomena such as the use of laughter, gaze and gesture can be added to this list (Bravo, 1998). A good number of studies available fall under the actional level, but other levels are gaining attention, especially the formal level in corpus-based studies (Aijmer, 2013); an increasing number of studies, on the other hand, cover more than one level (Placencia, 2008).

English and Spanish are the languages that have received the most attention in the study of regional pragmatic variation, followed by German. Other pluricentric languages such as Chinese, Dutch, French and Portuguese are still underexplored in this area. The majority of studies focus on appropriate rather than inappropriate behaviour. Also, most studies deal with the *national* level of analysis (see Section 2), offering contrastive studies of national varieties of a given language (e.g. German German vs. Austrian German) although in practice many focus on a sub-national variety since the data employed often corresponds to a specific location (e.g. Mannheim in Germany and Vienna in Austria). When it comes to British English, the choice of nomenclature reflects the corpus employed. For example, studies based on the International Corpus of English - Great Britain normally discuss features of 'British English' whereas 'English English' is the nomenclature that tends to be employed in studies based on data corresponding to England alone.<sup>5</sup>

In order to give a flavour of the area, below we consider a sample of studies that deal with regional variation in English and Spanish, as the most extensively studied pluricentric languages, as well as a sample of other less investigated languages. We include a few early studies and some recent works too. In terms of results, a caveat in this illustrative overview is that while numerous studies show the existence of regional pragmatic variation, as highlighted in Section 2, it needs to be borne in mind that regional affiliation normally interacts with other macrosocial factors such as age, gender and socioeconomic background as well as with microsocial factors such as power and distance. Given the complexity of the interplay between these different factors, most researchers choose to be selective. In this brief overview, we are also selective when reporting on

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<sup>5</sup> However, authors like Schweinberger (2015) employ the term British English, but specify the subvarieties of British English examined –“south-eastern varieties” in Schweinberger's study.

findings given space constraints, and, therefore, focus mainly on aspects relating to regional variation.

### **3.1 Studies on varieties of English**

The varieties examined mainly correspond to Anglo Englishes (Haugh & Schneider, 2012), with early studies focussing on American, British and South African English (Herbert, 1989; Tottie, 1991). Within the past decade, a greater number of national varieties, including Australian (Goddard, 2012), Irish (Schneider, 2005b) and New Zealand English (Jautz, 2008), have started to be examined.

The focus of study is varied, ranging from speech act realization (the ‘actional’ level) as in Barron (2005), to listener responses (the ‘organizational’ level) as in O’Keefe and Adolphs (2008), sequences of jocular exchanges (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012) and sequences of small talk (Schneider, 2008)<sup>6</sup> (the interactional level in both cases), as well as the use of pragmatic markers (the formal level), as in Schweinberger (2015).

Regarding similarities and differences in what is considered appropriate behaviour across the different regional varieties of English examined, taking the topic of complimenting behaviour as an example, Herbert (1989), for instance, looked at variation in compliments (and compliment responses) in American and South African English from an ethnographic perspective, using field notes from participant observation. He observed that compliments were more frequent in American English. He regards complimenting as a “conversational and cultural” strategy “for establishing solidarity” which he associates with notions of “equality and democratic idealism” (p. 29) and suggests that such notions are more typically encountered in American society. This would explain the higher frequency of compliments in American English compared with South African English.

Schneider (1999), on the other hand, adopting a sociopragmatic perspective examined compliment responses in Irish English (Dublin) vis-à-vis Chen’s (1993) results for American English and Chinese. This was on the basis of DCT data and with reference to Leech’s (1983) politeness theory. Schneider found some differences at the level of both super- and sub-strategies. Concerning the first, he found, for example, that the Irish had, overall, a larger repertoire of strategies, employing one more strategy than Americans and three more than the Chinese. Grouping the super-strategies according to whether they essentially conveyed acceptance or rejection, Schneider found that while Americans appear predominantly to follow Leech’s (1983) agreement maxim, and the Chinese, Leech’s (1983) modesty maxim, the Irish give relatively equal weight to agreement and modesty. With respect to sub-strategies, Schneider again found that the Irish employed a wider range than the Americans or the Chinese in Chen’s (1993) study.

To provide a more recent example on a different topic, Goddard (2012) examined the kind of talk that happens in an initial encounter (cf. Schneider, 2008), or what he refers to as ‘early interaction’ (the interactional level), in Australian, American and English English. More

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<sup>6</sup> See Case Study 1 (in section 4.1) for results corresponding to this study.



specifically, from an ethnopragmatics perspective and using a variety of sources, Goddard proposes certain cultural scripts that would account for similarities and differences in expected behaviour in early interactions across the three varieties. In terms of differences, he identifies different cultural notions in operation in the three contexts: projecting solidarity and equality stands out for Australians whereas projecting reserve for the English. On the other hand, a key cultural notion for Americans, who appear to emphasize individual differences, is projecting liking or approval. More recently, and also comparing initial interactions in Australian and American English, Haugh and Carbaugh (2015) focused on self-disclosure practices. In their analysis of elicited dyadic conversation data, they adopted an approach combining corpus-assisted interactional pragmatics with cultural discourse analysis. Both Australians and Americans were found to volunteer self-disclosures, but inter-varietal differences were also observed. For instance, the American participants employed positive assessments in response to self-disclosures more frequently and with a higher degree of intensification than the Australian participants. There was, however, also a noticeable amount of intra-varietal as well as intra-personal variation.

### **3.2 Studies on varieties of Spanish**

Studies on varieties of Spanish can be grouped into three broad categories: those contrasting a national variety of Spanish spoken in the Americas with Peninsular Spanish; those contrasting two/three Spanish American national varieties, and those examining varieties of Spanish at the sub-national level. A number of studies in the first category such as Puga Larraín (1997) where Chilean Spanish is contrasted with Peninsular Spanish were prompted by reported stereotypes among Latin Americans regarding Spaniards' interactional style, suggesting conflicting politeness norms. For example, for some Latin Americans, Spaniards appeared to be too direct or brusque, verging on the impolite. However, empirical studies have shown that directness in speech act realization is not necessarily a point of divergence across Spanish American varieties and Peninsular Spanish. Instead, one key feature of difference that would partly explain existing stereotypes is Spaniards' lesser use of mitigating devices when compared to Chileans (Santiago) (Puga Larraín, 1997) or Uruguayans (Montevideo) (Márquez Reiter, 2002), for example. Nonetheless, studies such as Placencia (2008) and Bataller (2015) (see below) highlight that variation at the *subnational* level in the use of mitigating and other devices should not be overlooked.

Another instance of this first group of studies is Fant (1996) where business negotiations among Mexicans in contrast with Spaniards were analysed on the basis of simulations recorded for training purposes in Mexico and Spain. Focussing on features of turn delivery and the exchange of turns (the organizational level), Fant found that Spanish negotiators talk more and produce more turns than Mexican negotiators in the same amount of time. This partly involved Spanish negotiators speaking faster than Mexican negotiators except during stressful situations where they slowed down. Mexicans, on the other hand, were found to do the opposite. Overlaps in turn-exchange occurred in both groups but were found to be higher among Spaniards. Also,

there was a higher proportion of interruptive overlaps in the Spanish corpus. The author interprets some of these findings as reflecting a higher tolerance among Spaniards of direct confrontation in negotiation.

More recently, Lower and Placencia (Lower & Placencia, 2015) look at nominal address usage on Facebook among Ecuadorian and Spanish females, aged between 18-24. They examine the categories of address forms employed such as first names and family (*hija* ‘daughter’) terms, mechanisms of address term modification, including shortening (*Ale* for *Alejandra*) or extending (*Cristinaaaa*) the name, the use of diminutives (*Martita*), enhanced personalization (*mi preciosa Tañita* ‘my lovely *Tañita*’), the function of address forms as well as other features. The study showed some common features across groups as well as some features of variation that point to local practices. Concerning types of address forms, for example, all main categories were found in the two groups, but employed with different frequencies in some cases. For instance, first names were the most frequent among the Spanish women while first names, together with family terms were the most frequent among Ecuadorian women. Also, Ecuadorian women were found to use mechanisms of address term modification considerably more frequently than their Spanish counterparts. While both groups employed shortened and extended forms, enhanced personalization was only found in the Quito corpus. On the whole, Lower and Placencia’s results suggest that address forms play a stronger rapport enhancement function among Quiteño women.

Concerning pragmatic variation across varieties of Spanish in the Americas, García (2008), for example, examined invitations (actional and interactional levels) in Venezuelan (Caracas) and Argentinean (Buenos Aires) Spanish by means of role plays, with reference to Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) work and Brown and Levinson’s (1987[1978]) politeness framework. She finds that, predominantly, both groups make use of solidarity strategies; however, she notes some differences too. For example, in making the invitation, Argentineans show a preference for mood derivable strategies, using imperative formulations, whereas Venezuelans appear to prefer want statements. As such, the author suggests that the former are firmer in their formulation of the invitation, and, thus, as opposed to the latter, do not give their interlocutors much room for negotiation.

The last group of studies, as indicated, corresponds to the examination of regional variation at the sub-national level. This is an area of growing interest. Placencia (2008) and Bataller (2015), for example, focus on similarities and differences in service encounter interactions across regional sub-varieties of Spanish. Placencia examines corner shop interactions in two locations in Ecuador: Quito and Manta, and Bataller, interactions in cafeterias in two locations in Spain: Huétor Santillán, near Granada, and Valencia. In both studies, various discourse levels of the service encounter interactions are examined. In terms of results at the actional or speech act level, for example, in Placencia (2008), direct requests were found to be preferred in both locations although there was some variation at the level of substrategies. Bataller reports similar findings for the two Spanish locations where she conducted her study. Another point of difference in Placencia’s study is that she found more mitigation in the Quito rather than the Manta data set. Likewise, Bataller found that Huétor Santillán customers employed mitigators more frequently than Valencia customers. Placencia suggests that, all in all, Quiteños appear to “display more interpersonal concerns than Manteños in their corner shop

transactions, creating a more personalised style of interaction” (p. 325). Manteños instead would be more task-oriented. Bataller (2015), in turn, interprets her findings as an indication of a stronger expression of solidarity in Huétor Santillán, compared with Valencia.

### 3.3 Studies on varieties of other languages

As remarked above, German is a pluricentric language that has received some attention too. Studies available have mainly focussed on pragmatic variation across Austrian and German German as in Muhr’s (1993) and Warga’s (2008) works on request realization. More recently, however, Swiss German also appears in some studies (cf. Schüpbach, 2014). There are also a few early studies contrasting the communicative style of Germans from the former German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. For instance, Birkner and Kern (2000) look at the management of self-presentation in job interviews across the two locations.

Leaving German aside, as also pointed out above, studies on varieties of other pluricentric languages, are scarce. They include, among others, the examination of refusals in Mainland and Taiwan Chinese (Spencer-Oatey, Ng, & Dong, 2008), address forms in Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch (Plevoets, Speelman, & Geeraerts, 2008); apologies in Canadian and French French (Schölmberger, 2008); refusals to invitations in Cameron and French French (Mulo Farenkia, 2015); diminution in Cypriot and Mainland Modern Standard Greek (Terkourafi, 1999); pronominal address in Brazilian and Angolan Portuguese (Silva-Brummel, 1984) and address practices more broadly in Finnish Swedish and Swedish Swedish (Clyne et al., 2006; Norrby & Kretzenbacher, 2014). Concerning methodological aspects, while literary works may have been the data source in the early years as in Silva-Brummel’s (1984) study, contemporary studies make use of a range of data and data sources, such as observation (Terkourafi, 1999), questionnaires, focus group discussions (Clyne et al., 2006), and existing corpora (cf. Plevoets et al., 2008).

Taking Swedish as an example, Clyne et al. (2006), for instance, report on a study on perceptions of variation and change of address systems in two varieties of Swedish –Finnish Swedish and Swedish Swedish– (and German). Their study is based on focus group discussions and participant observation in Vaasa and Gothenburg (and a German city). For example, they find that informal *du* (T) is regarded as the unmarked form in both varieties, but the more formal form *ni* (V) appears to be used more widely in Finnish Swedish compared to Swedish Swedish. However, Clyne et al. also report on some subnational variation concerning the perception of *ni*. With respect to Swedish Swedish, they find that while the young perceive it as a marker of politeness and respect, for people in the oldest generation (60+) *ni* is associated with condescension (p. 303). On the other hand, in Finnish Swedish, *ni* does not appear to have negative connotations of this type.

In short, this brief overview aimed to provide a window into the wealth of research in regional pragmatic variation, although space constraints have prevented us from delving deeper into methodological issues, for example, or looking at trends in politeness orientations concerning the languages most widely examined. This last task, however, may be a premature endeavour in any case given that there is still a long way to go in terms of understanding sub-

national variation in particular given the greater focus so far on national varieties. Also there are multiple contexts in which pragmatic variation can be examined. Media settings, including social media, for instance, are still greatly underrepresented in the politeness and regional pragmatic variation literature.

#### **4. Case studies**

In this section, two case studies are presented which are illustrative of research carried out on regional pragmatic variation and diverging perceptions of politeness and appropriateness. These studies deal with differences between national varieties of English and Spanish, respectively, as the two pluricentric languages which have received the most attention. The first case study compares manifestations of appropriateness across American, Canadian, English and Irish small talk, with a focus on opening moves and speech act realizations. The second case study contrasts rapport management in service encounters in Ecuador and Spain, with a special focus on (pro)nominal address. Both studies demonstrate how geographically distributed patterns of language use reflect diverging views of polite and appropriate verbal behaviour.

##### **4.1. Case study 1: Regional variation in appropriate behaviour in American, Canadian, Irish and English small talk**

This case study is focused on regional variation in English small talk and diverging notions of its appropriateness. Small talk, or, more technically, phatic discourse, is chosen as the focus here because it is especially susceptible to variation generally. As Nord (2007: 171) puts it: “the phatic function relies more on culture-specific conventions than any other function in communication.” While this may be an exaggerated statement overstating the case, there is no doubt that, in a global perspective, small talk differs across languages and cultures in both qualitative and quantitative terms, and concerning practices, expectations and attitudes (Schneider, 2008: 99-105).

Against this background, regional variation can also be expected to occur across varieties of English. The question what is considered appropriate and which differences can be observed across regions was addressed in a series of studies on small talk in four national inner-circle, i.e. first language, varieties of English involving British English (specifically English English/EngE), Irish English (as spoken in the Republic of Ireland/IrE) and American English (as spoken in the USA/AmE) (Schneider, 2008, 2011, 2012a), and also, though to a more limited extent, Canadian English (CanE) (Schneider & Sickinger, 2014). The method employed in these studies was a dialogue production task (DPT). In DPTs, informants are required to write an entire dialogue (cf. sections 3 and 4.2). In the instructions of this particular DPT, the informants were asked to produce a dialogue between strangers at a party. The dialogues elicited with this experimental format, warranting a high degree of variable control and thus comparability, were coded for speech acts (i.e. illocutions), content (i.e. propositions), interactional status (i.e. conditional relevance) and discourse position (in terms of turn-at-talk in the dialogue sequence).

The findings included both similarities and differences concerning pragmalinguistic as well as sociopragmatic parameters. Among the sociopragmatic similarities was the choice of speech acts used in this specific social situation. The speech acts occurring in all varieties under study included, first and foremost, the following (coding labels in all capitals name the illocutions, labels with capital initials name the propositions):

GREETING (e.g. *Hi!*)

REMARK Party (e.g. *Great party, isn't it?*)

QUESTION After You (e.g. *How are you doing?*)

QUESTION Identity (e.g. *What's your name?*)

DISCLOSE Identity (e.g. *I'm Ashley.*)

REMARK Identity (e.g. *I don't believe we have met.*)

COMPLIMENT Appearance (e.g. *I really like your top.*)

QUESTION Host (e.g. *How do you know the hostess?*)

In the realization of the speech acts employed, both pragmalinguistic similarities and pragmalinguistic differences were observed. Remarks about the party, for example, were overwhelmingly realized by using an elliptical construction consisting of a positively evaluative adjective and the noun *party* to which a question tag was attached, e.g. *Great party, isn't it?* While the type of construction was essentially the same, i.e. an ellipsis including an evaluative adjective and the noun *party* followed by a question tag, two variables occurred, namely the choice of adjective and the choice of question tag. Whereas *great* was clearly preferred by the informants from Ireland, a greater variety of adjectives was chosen by the informants from the other English speaking countries, including *great, nice, good, cool, rockin'* and adjectival *fun*. The question tag consistently selected by the informants from England and Ireland was *isn't it?*, whereas the American informants, without exception, used *hunh?* The Canadians used both *isn't it?* and *hunh?*, but also *eh?* (Schneider, 2015).

Considerable sociopragmatic differences were also found. Although the same speech acts were used in all national varieties, some were used with different frequencies and distribution. While no significant differences were observed concerning e.g. greetings or the host question, clear differences emerged in the frequencies and distribution of other speech acts, first and foremost those coded as DISCLOSE Identity and QUESTION Identity, i.e. introducing yourself and asking the interlocutor's name, and also QUESTION After You and REMARK Party, i.e. well-being inquiries and agreement-seeking assessments. The latter two speech acts were clearly favoured in the Irish dialogues. The former two, by contrast, were favoured by the Americans, but played only a minor role in the other dialogues. If DISCLOSE Identity and QUESTION Identity appeared in the English and Irish dialogues at all, they appeared at a later stage and were sometimes prefaced by an apology, especially in the English dialogues; cf., e.g. turn 5: *Sorry, I don't mean to be rude, but what's your name?* (cf. Schneider, 2011). Evidently, asking a stranger's name, even at a later stage in a conversation, is considered a face threat in Ireland and particularly in England, i.e. an intrusion into the private sphere of one's interlocutor. In informal

interviews, informants from England agreed that you can spend an enjoyable evening with a stranger without ever knowing this person's name.

Even more distinctive regional patterns were found in the opening turns of the dialogues. Over half of all English dialogues (56.7%) opened with a bare greeting, e.g. *Hi* (often responded to by a bare greeting in the second turn). The dominant pattern found in the Irish dialogues (73.3%) consisted of a greeting followed by a remark about the party, e.g. *Hi! Great party, isn't it?* The American dialogues, on the other hand, started with a greeting followed by a self-introduction (60%), e.g. *Hi, my name is Jill*. These findings suggest that the communicative task first to be solved in the given situation is interpreted in different ways in different parts of the English speaking world. Speakers from England seem to be focused on opening a conversation, since they open their dialogues non-specifically as they might open any conversation, i.e. by an exchange of greetings. Speakers from Ireland, by contrast, refer to the specific circumstances, i.e. the party. Finally, what seems to be salient for speakers from the United States is the fact that they are talking to a person they do not know and, thus, introductions have the highest priority. These salient opening patterns – focussing on position (English English), on the occasion (Irish English) or on the relationship (American English) – display a distinct regional distribution. In terms of politeness and appropriateness, the distinction between 'personal' and 'impersonal' (see also Section 4.2 below) seems to be immediately relevant in the present context. Speakers from England prefer an impersonal style in their openings, distinctly keeping a distance, whereas speakers from the United States clearly favour a personalized style when they introduce themselves straightaway and sometimes explicitly ask their interlocutor's name. Typical Irish opening moves can be situated in between. While speakers from England seem to follow Lakoff's (Lakoff, 1973) politeness rule 'Don't impose', speakers from Ireland seem to follow the rule 'Be friendly', without being too personal, however.

Three issues are important in this regard. First, the vast majority of all regional patterns identified are variety-preferential rather than variety-exclusive. Second, while a distinct regional distribution of the patterns can be observed, it must be emphasized that these are only dominant and not absolute patterns. In each case, the respective pattern was chosen by a significant majority, but not by all informants. This finding shows that variation exists not only between national varieties, but also within these varieties (cf. also Haugh & Carbaugh 2015), thus contradicting essentialist assumptions that language use might be *determined* by macro-social factors. The third and most important point is that the dialogues elicited by a discourse production task (DPT) and similar (written) experimental formats do not necessarily reveal what individual speakers would actually say in any real world situation (see Section 3). Such dialogues do, however, reveal what speakers would say or, more likely, think they should say. Experimental data of the type reported reveal, in other words, what is generally considered appropriate in a given type of social situation, i.e. they reflect collective expectations and culture-specific social norms. This does not mean that the informants involved in the experiments always (or ever) observe these norms. The data only show that speakers are aware of such expectations, which could be called conventions or, using a term introduced by Laver (1975), the 'polite norm' (cf. also Kádár and Terkourafi, this volume, on convention, ritual and (im)politeness). Divergence from this norm may be interpreted as rude behaviour. Consider again the example quoted above,

*Sorry, I don't mean to be rude, but what's your name?*, in which an anticipatory apology is employed, bearing witness to the fact that introductions and requesting the interlocutor's name do not have a high priority in English English small talk.

While collecting data by employing a written production questionnaire may be considered artificial and the validity of the data challenged, there is corpus support for at least some of the results reported above. Analysing the use of question tags attached to elliptical evaluations consisting of adjective + noun (e.g. *Beautiful dish, huh?*) in the spoken parts of the British and the Irish component of the International Corpus of English and the Corpus of Contemporary American English yielded a clear picture: There was no occurrence of *huh?* in the British and the Irish data and only 13 occurrences of *isn't it?* vis-à-vis 1,761 occurrences of *huh?* in the American data. This illustrates how corpus evidence can be employed to increase the validity of experimental findings.

Finally, it is a question of methodological concern to what extent the results reported above are representative of the national varieties of English under inspection and the countries these varieties are spoken in. As is usually the case in studies of regional pragmatic variation on the national level (cf. Section 3 above), the data were collected not only in the same subnational region, but also in the same town or city, to homogenize the four data sets in order to preclude the interference of subnational variation, as the elicitation of truly representative samples was not feasible. So, arguably, the reported findings are representative only of the respective subnational region or even just the respective places, or even only of particular groups of younger generation speakers in those places in the communities of practice of school and college students. On the other hand, there is evidence that these findings are typical not only of the region the data were gathered in. For instance, the British anthropologist Kate Fox, in her popular book *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (2004) identifies a 'rule of behaviour' she calls 'The No-name Rule', which describes the opening pattern found in the American dialogues reported on above (i.e. immediately introducing yourself by name) and shows that people in England consider such American behaviour as inappropriate or downright rude (Fox 2004: 38-39). Fox's observations seem to point to the fact that regional differences in language use conventions occur at a national level, or are at least perceived at a national level. Her observations nicely illustrate that norms and perceptions of (im)politeness and (in)appropriateness vary across regions in which the same language is spoken, yet not the same culture shared.. Small talk, as has been demonstrated, is a case in point. As Clyne (1994: 84) notes: "... small-talk requires common expectations among participants about its appropriateness and a common willingness to take part." Diverging expectations may lead to misperceptions and miscommunication. This applies more generally to all cases of diverging language use conventions, as also the case study presented in Section 4.2 will show.

#### **4.2. Case study 2: Regional variation in rapport management in service encounters in Ecuadorian (Quito) and Peninsular (Madrid) Spanish**

Elisa, an Ecuadorian returnee migrant who spent close to 20 years in Madrid, set up a corner shop in a residential neighbourhood in Quito, Ecuador on her return in 2013. In her initial interactions

with Quiteño customers, she found that they were reacting negatively to her. She reports that the main problem, as she found out, was that she was employing *tuteo* (address with *tú* ‘informal you’) with them as had been the norm for her in Spain in similar service encounters, whereas Quiteños seemed to expect *ustedeo* (address with *usted* ‘you formal’) (personal communication, April 2014). Likewise, in other service encounter interactions in Quito, where she was a customer, she found that some service providers challenged her *tuteo* and demanded to be addressed with *usted*. She was told that her use of *tuteo* showed *falta de educación* ‘lack of good manners’ as well as *falta de respeto* ‘disrespect’. These experiences soon forced Elisa to revise her ‘Spanish’ communicative style and (re)adapt to the local conventions by using the formal, distance-marking *usted*.

This anecdote illustrates a certain conflict in what is regarded as appropriate behaviour in the same context by speakers of two different regional varieties of Spanish in this case. Indeed, *usted* in face-to-face service encounters in Quito has been found to be associated with the expression of respect (Placencia, 2004); therefore, a person not using *usted* can be labelled as disrespectful as in Elisa’s case above. In the same setting, *usted* is also a way of maintaining a certain distance with people who are strangers (Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2004) or who are seen as not belonging to the same social class. A person using *tú* where *usted* is expected may thus be accused of being *confianzado*, that is, of acting “as though more *confianza* exists than is actually the case” (Fitch, 1998: 48). *Confianza* is a cultural notion applied to relationships characterized by “closeness and a sense of deep familiarity” (Thurén, 1988: 222). This label – *confianzado*– also extends in certain contexts in Quito to the use of first names where honorifics (Leech, 1999) such as *señorita* ‘miss’ are expected. By contrast, in a similar setting in Spain, egalitarianism appears to prevail and *tú* (together with first-name address) is of widespread use; *usted* may be equated with unfriendliness rather than being regarded as an important marker of respect.

Formality-informality is one of the cultural dimensions of variation that has been identified as important in some sociocultural contexts in the study of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, 2008) across cultural groups (cf. Jautz, 2008). This dimension interacts with another dimension that Márquez Reiter and Placencia (2004), for example, refer to as closeness-seeking vs. distance-maintenance, and can be linked to Spencer-Oatey’s (2000) notion of association rights which she uses to refer to people’s “fundamental belief” that they are “entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship” they have with them (p. 14). Spencer-Oatey suggests that association rights can be enhanced or threatened in the same way people’s face can be enhanced or threatened. Elisa’s initial use of *tú* address with customers or service providers in Quito appeared to have threatened their association rights in that they possibly perceived her way of speaking as too close or personal for their liking. In other words, the same communicative practice –*tuteo* in this case– in the same setting can be rapport-threatening in one socio-cultural context and rapport-maintaining (if not –enhancing) in another.

In order to explore perceptions of appropriate rapport management behaviour in service encounters in Quito and Madrid in the same context, an exploratory experimental study was carried out in 2015, with a focus on young females as customers. The study is based on a corpus generated by means of a dialogue construction task (cf. Schneider, 2008) with 6 situations. The



situation relevant for this study, modelled on naturally-occurring service encounter interactions (cf. Placencia, 2004), was formulated as follows:

You go to a corner shop in your neighbourhood to purchase some bread and milk. You know the shopkeeper (Guillermo) well since you have been going to that shop ever since you were a kid. Write a dialogue depicting the conversation as it would typically develop from the moment you enter the shop.

A dialogue construction task –a type of production questionnaire– was chosen as it facilitates variable control. Also, unlike DCTs, it generates whole interactions, allowing the researcher to analyse particular speech actions (the transaction in this case) embedded within openings and closings. The use of production questionnaires (Kasper, 2008) is not problem free, but it has been found effective in bringing to the fore what members of a given socio-cultural group regard as appropriate behaviour (cf. Schneider, 2012c). Additionally, studies employing naturally occurring data, while giving access to actual instances of language use, have their own limitations. For example, when it comes to service encounters, it is difficult to reliably note down customers' age just from observation alone or to gain access into their educational or socioeconomic background without asking them directly and thus interfering with their business at hand.

In order to keep the background of the participants relatively uniform, university students were approached to act as informants: 25 female university students, age 20 on average in Quito, and 21 in Madrid, completed the questionnaire. In both contexts, the universities selected are attended by students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

In terms of results, since the situation describes a high degree of familiarity between the participants ("you have been going to that shop ever since you were a kid"), a friendly interaction is expected. It is thus interesting to see how positive rapport is constructed across the two varieties, and how speakers of the two varieties go about the transaction. For space restrictions, however, we consider here only a few features of the interactions, with a focus on openings.

Opening actions that contribute to the construction of the interaction as friendly include greetings and/or well-being inquiries which can be accompanied by nominal address forms. Pronominal address usage is displayed in most cases, also marking how the participants perceive the relationship. Starting with greetings and/or well-being inquiries, these were produced by most 'customers' (22/25) in the two corpora, normally in the first turn of the interaction, as illustrated in examples 1 and 2 below.

(1) (Q, F19)<sup>7</sup>

01 Customer: *Hola Guillermo, ¿cómo está vecino?* (Q, F19)

          'Hello Guillermo, how are you<sup>V</sup> neighbour?'

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<sup>7</sup> 'Guillermo' is the shopkeeper in both contexts. Q stands for Quito, and M, for Madrid; F stands for female. Symbols employed include: V for formal pronominal address; T for informal pronominal address; A for augmentative, D for diminutive, and S for shortened forms (e.g. Guille for Guillermo). The examples are presented as they appeared in the questionnaires. In some cases, they do not conform with standard orthographic rules.

02 Guillermo: *Bien gracias hija.*

‘Fine thanks my daughter’

03 Customer: *Será que me puede dar un pancito y una leche?*

‘Do you think you<sup>V</sup> can give me bread<sup>D</sup> and milk?’

(2) (M, F21)

01 Customer: *Buenos días Guillermo, ¿qué tal?*

‘Good morning Guillermo, how are things?’

02 Guillermo: *Todo como siempre, guapetona. ¿Quieres lo de siempre?*

‘Everything as usual, goodlooking<sup>A</sup>. Would you<sup>T</sup> like the usual?’

The shopkeeper (Guillermo) produced fewer greetings or well-being inquiries in both contexts. Responding to customers’ requests as in (3) (*deme pancito y leche* “give me bread and milk”) appears to take precedence over the production of response greetings.

(3) (Q, F20)

01 Customer: *Buenas Sr Guille, deme pancito y leche!*

‘Morning/Afternoon/Evening Mr Guille<sup>S</sup>, give<sup>V</sup> me bread<sup>D</sup> and milk’

02 Guillermo: *Claro mijita, coja no más.*

‘Of course my daughter<sup>D</sup>, go<sup>V</sup> ahead and take<sup>V</sup> it’

Informal greetings as in (1) and semi-formal as in (3) above predominate over formal forms in both data sets: there is only one case of a formal greeting (e.g. *buenos días* ‘good morning’) in the Quito corpus, and seven in the Madrid corpus (see example 2 above). However, when it comes to pronominal address which surfaces through well-being inquiries (Example 1), offers of service (Example 2) and requests for a product (Example 3), the situation is somewhat different. In Quito, as can be seen in charts 1 and 2 below, there is a clear preference for formal *usted* among both customers and shopkeepers; conversely, there is a clear preference for *tú* in the Madrid corpus. This is in line with results in Placencia (2005), for example, based on naturally occurring data.

Chart 1: Pronominal address employed by customers (N=25 for each location)

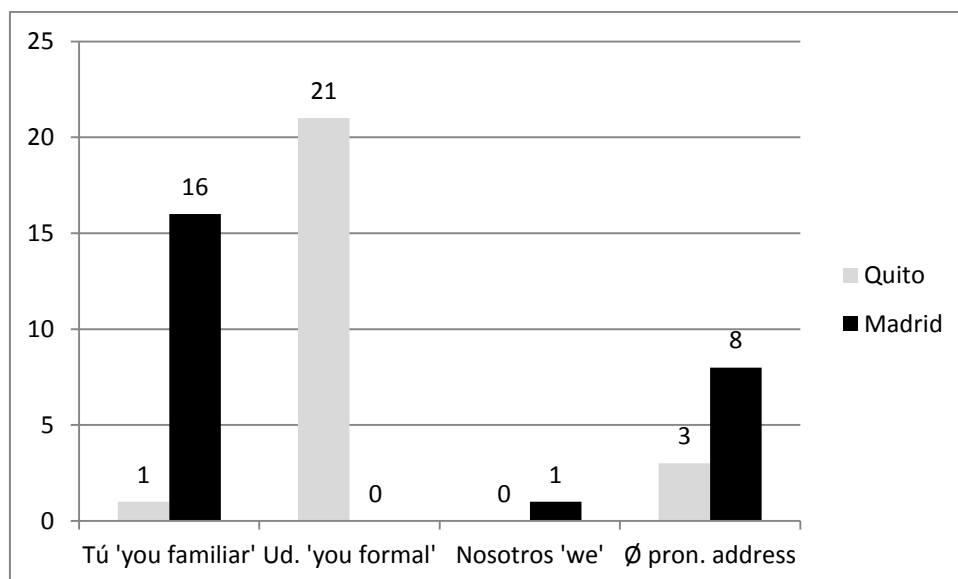
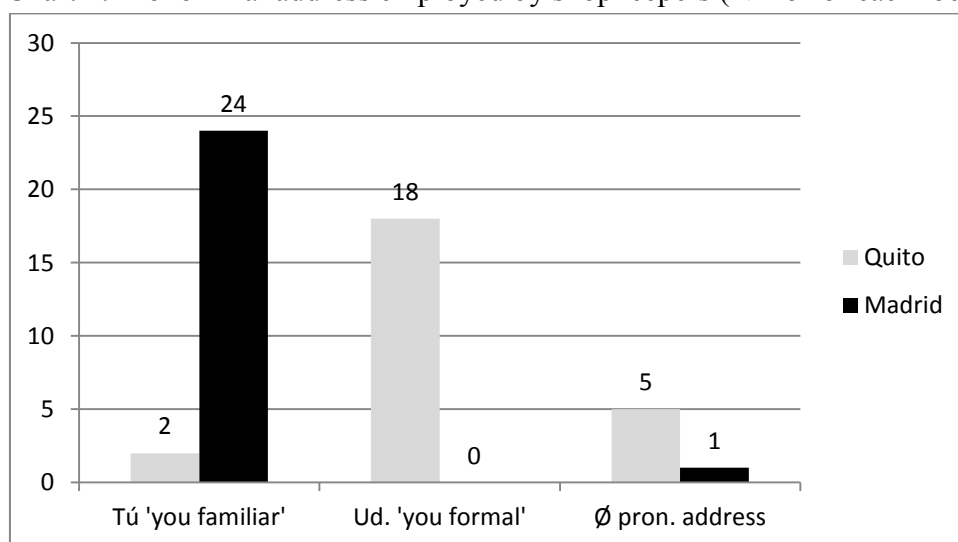


Chart 2: Pronominal address employed by shopkeepers (N=25 for each location)



Concerning well-being inquiries, both customers and shopkeepers produce them in both settings, although Quiteño customers produce them more often than shopkeepers (13 vs. 8/25); on the other hand, Madrileño customers and shopkeepers produce a similar number of these inquiries (9 vs. 10/25). In terms of conventions of form, a feature of difference that stands out is that Madrid inquiries correspond to somewhat impersonal forms such as: *¿qué tal?* ‘how are things’ as in (2) above or *¿cómo va todo/la jornada/la mañana?* ‘how are things/ how is everything/ the day/morning going’, whereas Quiteño inquiries are always personal: *¿cómo está?* ‘how are you<sup>V</sup>?’ as in (1) above, or *¿cómo le va?* ‘how are things going for you<sup>V</sup>?’. A greater orientation to personalization in service encounters among Quiteños, compared to Madrileños was observed in Placencia (2005).

Another feature of variation across data sets lies in the use of nominal address. As can be seen in Table 1 below, first name (in full), as in (2) above, is the most frequent form employed by customers in the Madrid corpus. Quiteño customers, on the other hand, appear to have a wider repertoire of nominal forms that includes first names (both full and shortened/familiarized forms, honorifics in combination with first names, as well as the endearment term *vecino* ‘neighbour’. As such, while keeping a certain distance, Quiteño customers are able to convey familiarity and affection at the same time when using diminutivized and playful, shortened first names on their own, or in combination with honorifics. These results appear to be in line with Placencia, Fuentes Rodríguez and Palma-Fahey’s (2015) study of address forms in Quito, Seville and Santiago de Chile, in a different context, where a wider range of forms was found to be in use among Quiteños, compared to Sevillanos. Shopkeepers in both Quito and Madrid use kinship terms although the Quiteño *mija* ‘my daughter’ is, again, more personalised than the Madrid *hija* ‘daughter’, and appears to be used more frequently among Quiteños (9 vs. 2/25). Madrileño shopkeepers, however, appear to use a wider range of endearments.

Table 1: Nominal address

Form		Quito (N=25)		Madrid (N=25)	
		Cust.	Shopk.	Cust.	Shopk.
First names	full forms <i>Guillermo</i>	5		19	1
	shortened/familiarised forms <i>Guille<sup>S</sup>/Guillo<sup>S</sup>/Guillermi<sup>D</sup></i>	5		-	-
Honorifics (Leech 1999)	<i>don/señor</i> ‘Mr’ + first name (full form) <i>don/señor Guillermo</i>	4		-	-
	<i>don/señor</i> ‘Mr’ + first name (shortened / familiarized form) <i>don /Señor Guille<sup>S</sup>/Guillo<sup>S</sup>/Guillermi<sup>D</sup></i>	6		-	-
	<i>niña</i> (literally, ‘young girl’)		7	-	-
Kinship terms	<i>mija</i> (short form for <i>mi hija</i> ‘my daughter’) <i>mijita</i> ‘ <i>mija</i> <sup>D</sup> ’	-	9	-	-
	<i>hija</i> ‘daughter’	-	-	-	2
Endearments	<i>Veci(no)</i> ‘neighbour’	3		-	-
	<i>mi niña</i> (literally, ‘my girl’)	-	2	-	-
	<i>bonita/guapa/guapetona/princesa</i> ‘pretty/goodlooking/goodlooking <sup>A</sup> /princess’	-	-	-	5
<b>TOTAL</b>		23	20	19	8

Ø nominal address	2	5	6	17
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All in all, the findings from this study show both shared as well as contrasting perceptions among Quiteño and Madrileño informants about appropriate rapport management behaviour in openings in the everyday service encounter scenario that was presented to them. In both cases, the opening of the encounter is rapport-enhancing as it is marked by friendliness through mostly informal greetings and/or well-being inquiries. However, there is divergence in perception when it comes to choice of pronominal address: *usted* ‘you formal’ is favoured by the Quiteño informants in this study, and *tú* ‘you informal’, by the Madrileño ones. This finding, in line with results from previous studies involving men and women of different ages (Placencia, 2005) would corroborate Elisa’s –the returnee migrant referred to in the introduction of this section– observations regarding expected behaviour in face-to-face service encounters in Quito.

As we also saw, what is considered appropriate differs with respect to nominal address too: Madrileño customers seem to prefer (unmodified) first-name address, consistent with familiar pronominal address. By contrast, Quiteño customers make use of a wider range of address forms, both formal and informal. Using these forms allows them to modulate their relationship with the shopkeeper, walking a tightrope between seeking closeness through displays of affection and maintaining the distance that appears to be expected in a commercial service encounter.

It has to be borne in mind though that the results from this exploratory study correspond to one context of face-to-face service encounters only, and that there are multiple other contexts that could potentially yield different results. Additionally, as we saw in Section 3.2, there can be subnational variation in the way service encounters are conducted, and rapport between service providers and customers, managed.

## 5. Summary and future directions

Perceptions of (im)politeness and (in)appropriateness have been found to be subject of regional variation. This type of variation has been examined so far mostly on the national level of pluricentric languages, first and foremost of English and of Spanish and also of only a handful of further mostly Indo-European languages. Hence more research is needed on other languages as well as on other levels of regional variation, especially the sub-national and local levels. Also, with respect to English, most studies have focussed on Anglo-Englishes, but other varieties of English should be examined too. Overwhelmingly, regionally distributed recurrent patterns of language use have been identified and interpreted as reflections of diverging norms and expectations. In this endeavour, the focus has predominantly been on the actional and also the interactional level as distinguished in variational pragmatics; but with the increasing adoption of corpus linguistic methods the formal level receives more and more attention, specifically the study of discourse markers. Since comparability is a key concern in any study of variation,

experimental methods, warranting a sufficient degree of systematic variable control, have largely been preferred. Typically, written production questionnaires including traditional discourse completion tasks (DCTs) have been employed, with their well-known drawbacks, as well as role plays to a lesser extent. Some methodological innovations have, however, been introduced such as the development of e-DCTs, spoken DCTs and dialogue completion tasks (also known as free DCTs) to counter some of the problems inherent in the use of traditional DCTs, namely the elicitation of 'spoken' data in written form and the focus on isolated speech acts. Corpus linguistics offers many further possibilities, but is not free from limitations either. As generally corpora can be searched only for forms but not for communicative functions, corpus-based studies of pragmatic variation have concentrated on the formal level, notably on the comparative study of discourse markers. However, once regional patterns of language use have been established in experimental work, corpus data, where available, can be employed in triangulation to increase the validity and robustness of experimental findings. Experimental studies on the other hand can also be useful as a follow up to studies based on naturally occurring data as they can allow for the examination of specific features of language use under controlled conditions and have the potential of being carried out in a large scale.

Some genres within media discourse such as advertising seem to constitute fruitful research areas which are underrepresented in studies of (im)politeness and regional pragmatic variation. Also, the internet, with its own methodological challenges (cf. Hine, 2009), offers numerous contexts for the analysis of intralingual variation, which are underexplored (e.g. e-commerce and social media). Concerning social media, given that interaction on social networking sites is not restricted by geographical boundaries, the study of regional variation would at first sight appear to be irrelevant; however, many Facebook users, for instance, continue to take part in local Facebook communities (Lower & Placencia, 2015). A fruitful endeavour would thus be to examine whether the greater interconnectedness brought about by social networking sites like Facebook and globalisation processes more widely is resulting in homogeneous perceptions and expressions of (in)appropriate or (im)polite behaviour online (cf. Sifianou, 2013).

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